



Core Elements for Antibiotic Stewardship in Nursing Homes

Top 10 Infection Prevention Questions to Ask a Nursing Home's Leaders



1. What infections commonly occur among residents in this facility?

Why is this question important? Nursing home residents can have a higher chance of getting an infection due to frailty from getting older, needing more help from caregivers who may not have clean hands, and open wounds or medical devices like IV tubes going into their body that break the skin providing a path for germs to enter the body. A nursing home should be tracking the common infections in its residents so they can be sure that actions are taken (i.e., infection prevention practices) to reduce the spread of germs to residents.



2. When was the last outbreak (i.e., infection spreading among residents) in this facility?

- ▶ What was the cause (e.g., flu, norovirus, other)?
- ▶ Did the facility request assistance from local public health authorities or any other partners?

Why are these questions important? Shared living spaces and lots of visitors can make it easier for a contagious germ (like flu or diarrhea from norovirus) to spread quickly through a nursing home. While many facilities experience outbreaks, early detection and quickly alerting public health authorities can help limit the spread of the infection to more residents, staff and visitors.



3. How does the facility communicate with residents, family and visitors when an outbreak occurs?

Why is this question important? Outbreaks of infections do occur in nursing homes. It is important the facility staff have a process for notifying residents, family members and visitors so everyone can take steps to decrease the chance of spreading the infection or getting ill. Sometimes a facility might have to restrict visitation or stop new admissions temporarily in order to stop an outbreak. In those situations, it's very important that everyone is informed about what is happening.



4. Is the flu vaccine mandatory for all staff working in this nursing home?

- ▶ What percentage of your staff received the flu vaccine this year (or last year)?

Why are these questions important? A growing number of healthcare facilities are making flu shots a requirement for staff as a measure to protect patients and staff from flu. In nursing homes, giving a flu vaccine to staff can help reduce the spread of flu in residents. Even if a flu vaccine isn't mandatory for staff, all staff should be offered the vaccine and a nursing home should know how many of their staff received the vaccine during the last flu season. The nursing home should also know what percentage of residents received the flu vaccine during the last flu season.



5. If a staff member is sick, is he/she allowed to stay at home (or go home from work) without losing pay or time off?

Why is this question important? Coming to work sick is never a good idea, but it can be really dangerous if a person is working with frail or older people who are at increased risk for getting severe infections. Nursing homes should have sick leave policies that support staff to make the right decision to stay home when they are sick.



6. How are facility staff trained to respond to questions about hand hygiene from residents and family?

Why is this question important? Cleaning hands before and after care for a resident is an important way to prevent the spread of infections. Residents and family members should feel comfortable and encouraged to provide helpful reminders to busy staff about cleaning their hands.



7. Are residents with new diarrhea given separate toilet facilities until the cause of their diarrhea is determined and/or the diarrhea is resolved?

Why is this question important? When a person has new diarrhea it's important to rule out contagious germs like *C. difficile*, as the cause. Diarrhea can contain large numbers of the germs causing it. Some of these germs, like *C. difficile*, are very tough and difficult to clean from the environment. One way to prevent the spread of infectious diarrhea is to have a separate toilet for an ill resident until the diarrhea goes away.



8. How is shared equipment (e.g., objects in the therapy area or common room) managed to prevent the spread of germs?

Why is this question important? People can carry germs on their skin or other parts of the body for long periods of time without being sick. Having a process to clean and disinfect shared equipment before the next resident uses it is a way to ensure these germs are not spread to others.



9. Does the facility have private rooms for residents who develop signs or symptoms of a potentially contagious infection like new cough and fever or new vomiting and abdominal pain?

- ▶ If the facility does not have private rooms, what precautions are taken?

Why are these questions important? When a resident develops signs and symptoms which could be due to a contagious germ, like flu or norovirus, one way to protect the resident and others in the facility is to provide the ill resident with a private room until the cause of their symptoms is known. If a private room is not available, the facility should have a process to prevent spread of a contagious germ in a shared room. Other residents can get sick from germs picked up from contaminated surfaces or spread by unclean hands. Containing a contagious germ quickly can prevent spread to other residents, staff and visitors.



10. Does the facility provide educational materials for residents and families on the following topics?

- ▶ Hand hygiene
- ▶ Use of gowns/gloves and other equipment to prevent the spread of germs
- ▶ Antibiotic use policies/practices in this facility
- ▶ *C. difficile*

Why is this question important? Residents and families are important partners in preventing the spread of infections and reducing misuse of antibiotics. Nursing homes should have materials to educate their residents, families and visitors on the facility's infection prevention and antibiotic stewardship policies, and steps they can take to support a safe environment.